

Comparison of Descartes view on god

When it comes to the existence of God many theologians and philosophers have argued both for and against the existence of God. In this essay I will critically assess both Descartes argument for the existence of God and Hume's objections to the existence for God.

There are six arguments which are used to try prove the existence of God:

1. Ontological – Starting from the definition of God
2. Cosmological – Starting from facts of the physical world
3. Teleological – Starting from the design of the world
4. Moral – Starting from the human sense of morality
5. Religious Experience – Starting from religious experience
6. The argument from Miracles

The Ontological argument attempts to prove the existence of God through abstract reasoning alone. It concludes that God's definition entails his existence. The Ontological argument is the only argument that is *a priori* because the premises for the argument are prior to any experience of the world, and are not verified by any experience. 'Ontological' literally means 'concerned with being'. This argument was classically propounded by Anselm, but it was criticised by both Aquinas and Kant and had supporters such as Descartes.

The Ontological argument appeals more to believers in God than to an atheist because an atheist may not accept the first premise of the argument. Because the Ontological argument has an *a priori* argument as its grounds, it is a logically argument that either completely succeeds or completely fails.

The propositions of the argument are analytic because the predicate is contained in the subject; this means the statement clarifies the term God. To speak of God as a perfect being is to imply that he exists.

Descartes Ontological Argument- Meditations 5

- I have an idea of God, a supremely perfect being, who has all perfections
- Existence is part of perfection.

Therefore God a supremely perfect being exists

Meditations 5 argued that there are some qualities an object had or else it could not be defined as that object. Descartes used a triangle as an example, the three angles have to add up to 180 degrees or the shape could not be defined as a triangle. In the same way existence can't be separated from the concept of God. According to Descartes that would be a contradiction.

However Kant objects to Descartes by claiming that there would no contradiction if one was to reject both the subject and predicate.

Kant wrote in 'Critique of pure reason'

'It would be self contradictory to posit a triangle and yet reject its three angles, but there is no contradiction in rejecting the triangle together with its three angles'

But Descartes reply is to agree this is true when it concerns a triangle, but false when it comes to God. Descartes argues that for God existence is part of essence.

However Kant objects even further by claiming that Descartes treats existence like a property. For example the same way you talk about an apple being red is the same way Descartes talks about God existing. Kant argues that treating existence like a property don't make sense because he claims existence is not a predicate. Therefore according to Kant Descartes Ontological argument for the existence of God doesn't work.

Hume also objects to Descartes argument, he claims the argument seems to be assuring the existence of God through its definition. One could argue this implies one can define anything into existence.

Hume wrote in 'Dialogues concerning Natural Religion'

However much our concept of an object we may contain, we must go outside it to determine whether it exists. We cannot just define something into existence – even if it has all the perfections one can imagine.

Hume would also object to Descartes by using his 'fork' from 'An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding'.

Hume's 'fork' two claims

1. All knowledge can be neatly divided in 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact'. This means that statements are either analytic or synthetic. Analytic statements analysis the meaning of words, for example 'All vixens are female'. Synthetic statements are statements that aren't analytic.
2. 'Relations of Ideas' can be known a priori, by intuition or deduction. This applies to geometry, algebra and arithmetic. Whereas 'Matters of Fact' are only known from experience, in other words there are no synthetic a priori truths, this applies to matter of the world. For example just because the sun rose today how do you know it will rise tomorrow.

Hume fork implies that you can't deductively prove anything about the world, and this objects to Descartes Ontological argument.

However Kant objects to Hume's 'fork' because he claims that there are synthetic priori truths. Kant claims that you know a priori that your experiences will always have certain general properties, and these properties follow from innate categories of the human mind, in terms of which experience is structured. Space, time causation, substance and identity are all categories of the human mind.

But Hume replies to Kant's criticism of his 'fork' by claiming that first of all one's mind can change and second of all some beliefs by philosophers thought to be a priori truths about the world were mistaken and proved otherwise by science. For example to Aristotle inertia seemed self-evidently impossible. Hume claims that a priori 'self-evidence' truths can't be trusted as a guide to truth in the actual world. Therefore according to Hume, Descartes Ontological argument for the existence of God doesn't work.

One could conclude that the Ontological argument is insufficient to prove the existence of God, especially to an atheist. This because a atheist wouldn't agree with the first premise of the argument 'I have an idea of God'. It seems at most that one could say that if God does exist he will have necessary existence, but this doesn't prove the existence of God.

The Cosmological argument for the existence of God claims that the universe can't account for its own existence and it can't keep itself in existence and so the argument seeks causes to the solution in the existence of God. The Cosmological argument infers God from the existence of the world and the phenomena in it, such as causality.

Aquinas argues the cosmological argument in the first three of his 'five ways'. The argument is supported by many philosophers such as Leibniz and Descartes.

Aquinas' Five Ways:

- The unmoved mover
- The uncaused causer
- Possibility and Necessity
- Goodness, Truth and Nobility
- Teleological

All the arguments are *a posteriori* because they have some observation from the experience of the universe as a starting point.

Movement: A moved by B moved byfirst mover itself unmoved = God

Cause: A caused by B caused byfirst cause itself uncaused = God

Existence: always dependent or contingent

A is what it is because B is what it is.....first existence is necessary

Descartes uses the cosmological argument his second argument to try to prove the existence of God.

Descartes version: Cause must have reality as it's effect, the idea of a perfect being is caused by God. Therefore God exists.

However Hume also objects to Descartes cosmological argument for the existence of God by using his theory of causation in his book 'An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding'. Hume describes causation as a feeling of expectation we get when we have experienced a constant conjunction of events.

The teleological argument is the argument from the order in the world to the existence of a being that created it with a specific purpose in mind. *Telos* is Greek word for 'end' or 'purpose' The argument infers a designer from the occurrence of order and regularity in the world. Order regularity and purpose are seen as marks of design; the argument concludes that God must be the source of that design.

Design argument are *a posteriori* and there are various types:

- Argument **from** design
- Argument **to** design

This is also known as the Anthropic Argument this is the argument of nature planning in advance to meet the needs of intelligent beings this provision requires intelligence, God.

Hume has many criticisms of the Anthropic Argument

- 1) An unsound analogy

Hume argues that strength of the argument depending on the analogy of the world a the machine is very weak. He claims the weak similarity makes a weak argument. According to Hume our world isn't like a machine because it is composed of vegetables making it more organic than mechanical., He also argues that is philosophically unsound to argue that intelligence is the necessary governing principle behind the world. Hume argues that there are other alternative governing principle such as generation, vegetation and gravity that could be the dominating principle. Hume used an example of a house to emphasise how the world doesn't resemble something man-made. If we see a house we conclude with certainty that it had an architect or builder because we have seen it being built but the universe doesn't bear such resemblance with that certainty we could infer a similar cause of intelligence because we have no experience of universes being designed and built. And also in the same way there is a group of people that built the house there could have been a group of Gods who designed the world.

2) Similar effects and similar causes

While Hume emphasises the difference between a machine and world, he goes further by questioning whether it is a sound notion that similar effects result from similar causes. Wouldn't we have had to experience the origin of the world to know that an organised universe must have arrived from intelligence and thought? Couldn't similar effects be a result of different causes? For example a fire alarm can go off because the heat it detects from a fire, however the alarm could also go off because a mechanical fault.

3) Other analogies possible

As already stated, Hume argued that the world resembles more an animal or vegetable than a machine or watch. Particularly he argued that the world could be compared with a carrot. If the analogy is made with a carrot then generation or vegetation could cause the mark of design in the world. The natural world may possess some inner self-regulation and growth. One could say that Hume's argument is like an early form of Darwin's argument of evolution. Hume argues that intelligence is itself caused by the process of generation and the process of causes continues because intelligence requires a cause. Therefore wouldn't you end up with an infinite regression of causes.

4) God more human than Divine

Hume claims that the more you push the analogy of the watch the more human you have to make God because of the ides of similar effects implying similar causes.

For instance Infinity couldn't be attributed to any attributes of God. The cause ought only to be proportional to the effect and because the effect is not infinite we have no reason to ascribe infinity to God. Likewise perfection can't be ascribed. An example would be that from footprints in the sand one could infer that a person has walked here, however you could not infer that the person was wearing a Walkman just from the footprints.

It is impossible to tell whether this system has faults and even if it was perfect it's uncertain whether that can be ascribed to the workmen. For example the world could've been bungled before this system was made.

5) Non-moral God

Hume lists unpleasant features of nature such as earthquakes, war and disease and questions how the planning and design could be that of a just God. Hume argues

that workmen have to be judged by the quality of the work they produced. He also argues that one can't attribute to the cause anything more than what is sufficient to produce the effect. His claim was that a more plausible prediction would be a God who had no moral character or alternatively two forces of good and evil.

6) Universe accidental

Hume suggests that we can't be certain that the universe was not just one big cosmic accident.

The argument from miracles is the argument that the occurrence of miracles demonstrates both the existence of God and the truth of Christianity. The miracles argument claims that God is the explanation for the events that oppose the laws of nature and is used to support Christianity.

Hume offers four factors in 'An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding' that count against the creditability of most miracle testimonies:

- Witness of miracle typically lack integrity .

Hume describes miracles as being a violation of the laws of nature. The law of nature is regularity without exception, so they have evidence amounting to proof. Therefore Hume claims that the testimony would only be sufficient if it amounted to stronger proof, or in other words it would be even more of a miracle for the testimony to be false. For example if everybody in the world except for one saw all the stars fall out of the sky, it would be a greater miracle for everyone to be lying to the one person who didn't see than for the miracle to be false.

- Humans have a propensity to sensationalise, which prompts us to uncritically perpetuate miracle stories.

Hume claims that humans have a passion of surprise and wonder and this agreeable emotion makes them believe the reports of miracles. This is a tendency of the mind that is exactly opposite to the principle of habit. This is the belief of something that has happened less in the past, believing against the evidence.

Also some enjoy arousing surprises and wonder in others, so they pass on reports of miracle that they don't believe themselves.

- Miracle testimonies abound in barbarous nations.

Hume states that in barbarous nations people mistakenly witness miracle or that the people deliberately lie about miracles, thinking it is good for the nation and therefore justified.

- Miracles support rival religious systems and therefore discredit each other.

Hume criticises miracles because they are used to support different religions, but this means that they would discredit each other because no religion believes in the same things.

Hume argues that miracles fail to prove the existence of God because they lack creditability. Hume could also argue that even if miracles did exist, what proof is there that they are from God.

When it comes to assessing Descartes' arguments for the existence of God one can find a number of weaknesses that discredit them.

Descartes ontological argument has a lot of weakness

1. Definition

Definition of God in the ontological argument can be considered a weakness

2. Moving from concept to reality

Like Hume Many argue against the ontological argument because they claim it move from an idea or concept to reality, that is just not possible

3. Not great-making quality

Kant argues that existence is not a predicate, doesn't tell us what object is like. It is not adding to concept, not making the concept of God greater by adding reality.

4. No analytic existential proposition

Some philosophers argue that propositions are synthetic and contingent and pronounce the ontological argument guilty of logical tricks by claiming God exists. However others argue that there are possible analytic existential propositions. For example 'science fiction characters do not exist'.

Because of these weaknesses one could conclude that Descartes ontological argument fails to prove the existence of God. One could also argue that Anselm's 2nd form of the ontological argument is better than Descartes because it attempts to prove it is possible to conceive God as not conceiving.

His 2nd form came about as a reply to the objection that it is self-contradictory to conceive of something which nothing greater can be thought yet to deny that that something exists.

Anselm's 2nd form of the ontological argument

- God is the greatest thing that can be conceived
- It is greater to be a necessary being than a contingent being
- If God exists as a contingent being, then a greater being can be imagined that can't be conceived not to exist
- This being would then be greater than God
- God is therefore a necessary being

Therefore God must exist in reality.

One could also find Descartes cosmological argument fails to prove the existence of God because one could still claim that the universe has no ultimate explanation, it is just a fact. Therefore the cosmological argument can only hint at the possibility of God. The argument has two ways at looking at the universe, either it's inexplicable or that it is intelligible. So that if there is an explanation possible that explanation could be found in God. Also one could find Aquinas' version of the cosmological argument better.

When it comes to assessing Hume arguments against the existence of God one can also find a number of weaknesses that discredit them.

An objection to Hume's 'Fork', which is used to objection to Descartes ontological argument is according to the fork, the fork itself should be burnt:
Hume doesn't argue for the first claim of the fork, the claim that all knowledge can be neatly divided into 'matter of fact' and 'relations of ideas'. This is on the basis of experience, instead he supposes it to be self-evident or a priori.
Yet the first claim of the fork is also a 'matter of fact', whose negation is not self-contradictionery. Therefore Hume fork is based on a matter of fact that is supposed by Hume to be a priori. In other words the fork is based on a synthetic a priori truth. This is the very thing the fork says is impossible. One could conclude that Hume's 'Fork' is too weak to be able to object to Descartes ontological argument.

An objection to Hume's theory of causation that is used to object to Descartes cosmological argument is that surely not all constant conjunctions are causes. For example just because the Manchester factory siren sounds and at the same time in London all the workers go home doesn't mean that manchester siren caused London workers to start packing up.
Hume is not describing how to use the word cause so that it has meaning he is prescribing the way we should use it. Therefore the example would mean the Manchester siren was the cause of the London workers packing up and going home, and that doesn't make sense. We ought only say this if the conjunctions are genuinely constant because perhaps there is doubt. For example Manchester siren sounds and London workers remain at their posts because they have agreed to overtime.
Sometimes one can have suspicions of this sort on basis of our general experience of types of constant conjunctions and therefore find Humes argument not strong enough to object to the cosmological argument.

One could also criticise Hume's objections against the argument from miracles

- Hume identified habit as a description of how mind works but now he is using it prescriptively by stating that miracles should be based on appropriate application of habit principle.

Jumping the Is- ought gap is typical of Hume's arguments. Hume should simply describe factors that cause people to believe in miracles not evaluate them. For example Hume talks of passion of surprise and wonder as being the cause of belief in miracle, but is there anything wrong with that?

- Hume's definition of miracle make it logically impossible. He describes a miracle as something which violates law of nature, so if a miracle happened there would no longer be a law of nature. Therefore a miracle would no longer be a miracle because it no longer violate laws of nature.
- Hume doesn't deal with the belief of a miracle based on direct personal experience but on basis of testimony from others.

In conclusion one could argue that both Descartes arguments for the existence of God and Hume's objection against the existence of God are weak and insufficient to prove their desired points.